



RABBI SHALOM

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KeVnei Maron – Passing Before Hashem

In the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer recited on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we declare:

”וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנֶיךָ כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן, כְּבָקָרֶת רוּעָה

עֹדְרוֹ, מִעֲבִיר צֹאֵנוּ תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ...”

All human beings pass before You keVnei Maron — like sheep under the shepherd's staff, as he counts his flock one by one...

This phrase is drawn from the Mishnah¹:

בְּאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדּוֹן... בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בָּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן...

At four junctures the world is judged, ... on Rosh Hashanah all human beings pass before you like sheep....

The Gemara² records three explanations of this phrase, presented below in accordance with Rashi's interpretation:

1. **Like sheep** (*keVnei imrana*) - as when sheep are counted one by one for tithing

1. Rosh Hashanah 16a

2. ibid. 18a

(*ma'aser behemah*) by passing through a narrow passage.

2. **Like the ascent to Beit Maron** - a narrow mountain path, with a deep ravine on either side, where only one person can pass at a time.
3. **Like the soldiers of King David** - as they were counted individually when gathering for war.

Each of these three metaphors expresses a different dimension of our relationship with Hashem and the meaning of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

1. LIKE SHEEP - SUBMISSION TO THE KING

The sheep is a symbol of submission and obedience, following its shepherd wherever he directs it. Likewise, when we describe ourselves as sheep before Hashem, we affirm our absolute submission to His kingship.

On Rosh Hashanah we pray: מְלוֹךְ עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם – “Reign over the entire world in Your glory.” The Taz³ notes the double expression “*kol ha'olam kulo*” – “the entire world, all of it.” At times the word *kol* (“all”) is used to mean “most,” but here we stress that we ask Hashem to reign not only over the world as a whole, but over every part of it and every part of us.

The Yeshuot Yaakov⁴ explains further: A human king can impose taxes, imprison or

3. Taz, Orakh Haim 582:3.

4. Yeshuot Yaakov, ad loc.

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even execute, but he cannot govern people's thoughts and inner life. Hashem, however, is sovereign over body and soul, over our lives in this world and the next, over every thought, feeling, and action. Thus, when we accept His kingship, we declare Him King over *kol ha'ol-am kulo* - over all existence, and every part of ourselves.

To see ourselves as sheep, then, is to accept this complete submission to Hashem. By doing so, we guard ourselves from arrogance and anger. Hazal⁵ teach: כָּל הַכּוֹעִים כָּל מִינֵי גִּיהֲנוֹם שׁוֹלְטִין בוֹ - *"Whoever becomes angry, all kinds of Gehinnom rule over him"*. The Rambam⁶ similarly writes: כָּל הַכּוֹעִים כְּאִלּוּ עוֹבֵד עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה - *whoever exhibits anger, it is as if he engages in idolatry*. Why is anger viewed so severely? Because anger stems from placing the self at the center, forgetting that everything comes from Hashem. To live with humility, like the sheep who follows its shepherd, is to recognize Hashem as the true source of all.

2. LIKE THE ASCENT OF BEIT MARON - STRIVING UPWARD

The second explanation likens us to travelers ascending the steep, narrow path of Beit Maron. This is the image of constant ascent — the Jew is always called to grow, to climb higher.

This is the meaning of the Torah's description of Yehoshua bin Nun⁷:

“וַיִּמְשְׁרֵתוּ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון יָעַר לֹא יָמִישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל.”

"His attendant, Yehoshua son of Nun, a lad, never left the Tent."

At that time, Yehoshua was already fifty-six years old.⁸ Why, then, is he called a

5. Nedarim 22a

6. Rambam, Hilkhot Deot 2:3

7. Shemot 33:11

8. See Ibn Ezra and Ramban to *Shemot* 33:11, who calculate Yehoshua's age at that time.

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na'ar, a lad? Rav Yisrael Salanter explained that “youth” and “old age” are not merely measures of years, but states of mind. The old man looks backward, reflecting on what he has already accomplished. Youth look forward, are filled with plans, dreams, and aspirations. Yehoshua, though advanced in years, remained forever young, always looking upward, striving to grow.

This is what the prophet Hoshea⁹ means when he declares: כִּי יָעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶהְיֶה -

For Israel is a youth, and I loved him. Hashem loves Am Yisrael for their youthful quality, their constant striving to advance and their refusal to become stagnant.

3. LIKE THE SOLDIERS OF DAVID - DISCIPLINE AND PRECISION

The third explanation compares us to the soldiers of King David, counted as they went

9. Hoshea 11:1

out to battle. This imagery highlights discipline and precision. A soldier does not live for himself, but according to the command of his commander.

So too, a Jew is a soldier in Hashem's army. He must rise on time for prayer, fulfill mitzvot at their appointed times, and live with discipline in both *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam laHavero*. To be counted like soldiers means to live life not casually or haphazardly, but with loyalty and precision in the service of Hashem.

CONCLUSION

These three images: sheep, climbers, and soldiers, offer us a map for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and indeed for Jewish life. As sheep, we learn humility and submission to Hashem's kingship. As climbers on the ascent of Beit Maron, we commit ourselves to constant growth, never content with what we have achieved. As soldiers of King David, we

embrace discipline and faithfulness, serving with exactness and devotion.

When we stand before Hashem on the Yamim Noraim, each of us passes individually, one by one, like *keVnei Maron*. It is a moment of profound intimacy, where Hashem looks not at the masses, but at the singular soul standing before Him.

May we merit to approach these days as humble sheep, aspiring youths, and devoted soldiers and in doing so, may we be inscribed for a year of blessing, growth, and closeness to the King of Kings - *Melekh Malkehei HaMelakheim*. ■

 **Mazal Tov to** 
Stefan & Rochelle Somogyi
on the birth of their
great-granddaughter



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Wishing you a Shana Tova
and well over the fast

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